



Department Updates

February 2023

Circuit Court

Judge James Babler

Night Court for Child Support Ends

After a very successful 10-year run, the Night Court for child support has ended. In the summer of 2012, the Barron County Circuit Court began the innovative program of Night Court for Child Support. At that time, all appearances were in person at 8:00 a.m. Many of the custodial and non-custodial parents had to take off a half day or full day of employment, thereby losing money just to show up for court. The Judges held Night Court one time per month beginning at 6:00 p.m. sometimes running up to three hours averaging two hours per night prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Once the pandemic began and the Court began using Zoom for child support cases, the request for Night Court dates plummeted. The Judges were averaging three cases per session, finishing with court within a half hour.

Everyone involved recognized late in 2022 that with the continued use of Zoom for child support, participants could appear from work and not have to take off time, so it was no longer necessary to have the Night Court sessions. Consequently, the Judges decided that we would no longer hold Night Court for Child Support effective January of 2023.

The Judges are proud of the service we provided for litigants with Night Court for Child Support and recognize it could not have been provided without the cooperation of the Clerk of Circuit Court, Sheriff, Corporation Counsel and Public Defender. However, times have dramatically changed and we are now able to provide the same or even better service for litigants with Zoom.

Medical Examiner

Nate Dunston, Medical Examiner

In 2022, we had 526 deaths reported to the Medical Examiner's Office. The office completed 165 death certificates and 439 cremation permits. The busiest month for the office was September with 54 cases. There were 19 autopsies performed with the majority of them going to the Midwest Medical Examiner's Office in Ramsey, MN. The breakdown of the manner of deaths are 477 naturals, 4 suicides, 43 accidents, 1 homicide, and 1 undetermined.

The office started utilizing computerized charting software, prior to the upgrade all of our documentation was being done on PDF. Now our reports are more standardized and thorough. We are also able to access our reporting software remotely while on scene or at the funeral home.

Our largest hindrance this past year is that laboratory results have seen an increase in turnaround times ranging from 4-6 months to 6-9 months.

An alarming trend continues as we see an increase in overdose deaths with nine of them being from Fentanyl.

So far in 2023 we have had 56 deaths reported. One death was caused by structure fire and another death was from a snowmobile accident. Five deaths have been caused by injuries related to accidental falls.

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Highway Department

Mark Servi
Highway Commissioner

During the recent cold snap, members of the staff and crew helped to make the office move and help organize areas of the new facility. From a management perspective, it is very nice to have the operations all under one roof, and be able to just walk down the hall to have a conversation. The heated storage area (where the equipment is parked) should be ready to occupy in a few weeks. Construction of UH2, the unheated storage building on the east side of the main facility, is expected to begin February 20th.

The winter has been difficult. There have been more storms and freezing rain events this year compared to last (based on the Winter Storm Reports the Department submits to DOT):

Year	Snow Amount (Inches)	# Storms	# Freezing Rain Events	Severity Index
2021-22	43.5	22	5	64.01
2022-23	67.9	28	14	94.50

As the data would indicate, this winter has required the Highway Crew to be out plowing and taking care of winter conditions much more frequently. Of course this also means winter is costing more to manage this year. On the state system, we have spent \$912,911 so far this year on winter operations, compared to \$548,923 last year at this time. We see a similar cost trend on the county system as well.

Keeping our crew and the traveling public safe is the top priority of the Highway Department.

Legislative action near the end of the last session (fall of 2022) gave us another tool in our toolbox, the ability to use green lights on our plow equipment. The green light penetrates the snow cloud better than the white and orange used previously. The green is now augmenting the white and orange lighting systems. We have begun installing the green lights on our plow trucks.

At this time, WISDOT is currently soliciting projects for funding in the Local Road and Local Bridge Programs. The Department is currently reviewing our bridges to determine funding eligibility, and is working with the local units of government to determine if they have eligible bridges. Funding can be used for repair or replacement, depending on the criteria met. We anticipate having multiple bridges between the county and the locals that we will be working on the applications for funding, which are due to DOT by March 24th. We are currently awaiting additional solicitation for the STP-Rural program. The Department has several projects that we are ready to submit for funding consideration, including CTH U from CTH A south to the county line, a project that the County Board approved funding for local design in 2021. The design has been paused, as it is at the point where continuation of the design is dependent on obtaining funding for construction.

As winter hopefully works to an end please remember to look out for work zones as we are out performing pavement maintenance. Also please remember don't crowd the plow. We strive to provide a safe road, and we need your help to attain that goal.

Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC)

Jennifer Jako, Director

The ADRC is the one-stop shop for information and resources for older adults, adults with disabilities, caregivers, and other community providers and partners. We provide information about Wisconsin's long term care programs, help match customers with local resources, and provide information on living options, in home help options, and how to pay for it all. ADRC's raise visibility about the full range of available options and provide information that is unbiased and confidential. Sometimes people aren't sure what they need, but after working with our office, they have more clarity on options and what to consider as they age. The older population in Barron County is the fastest growing population, which means our office is being contacted by more and more people.

Reflecting on 2022: The ADRC is continuously improving processes and services to serve as many as we can efficiently and effectively. Our staff strive for good customer service. In 2022, we accomplished many projects. 1) Our regional ADRC went through a reorganization; we are now the ADRC of Barron & Rusk Counties and Washburn County created their own ADRC. This has been an effective, smooth transition. We are seeing improved collaboration and partnering which improves customer service. 2) We were awarded a Community Health Worker (CHW) Grant. Our pilot was designed to employ limited term CHWs to build capacity for our Home Delivered Meal program and dementia care services. The data is indicating success in both pilots. This data will be shared with the State of Wisconsin and will help advocate for the role of CHWs in agencies like ours. 3) We were awarded a 5310 grant, funding to replace one of our AddLIFE transit vans. We also updated many of our transportation co-pays and contracts to help meet budget constraints. 4) The ADRC took charge of many caregiver initiatives, including starting the new WeCare Coalition. 5) A small, but important project for our ADRC - all staff participated in cleaning up our electronic files. Over the years, electronic files can become unorganized, duplicated, and outdated. Happy to report our electronic files are organized and our workflow is improved. Overall, nearly all of our services saw increase in demand in 2022. Big plans for 2023 include improving our volunteer onboarding process, helping customers navigate the public health unwinding, and hopefully building a new kitchen.

Nutrition Program Kitchen update: Home-Delivered Meals remains one of the top requested services from the ADRC. As the population ages, we continue to see increased demand for this service. In 2013, we served ~65,000 meals to the community. In 2023, we anticipate to serve well over 100,000 meals. In January, on average, we served 410 meals each day. (We typically have 252 service days each year, so we are on track to serve 103,320 meals in 2023, which does not account for expected growth in demand). Our current kitchen at Ventures in Cameron is at capacity for storage and cooking. It remains critical for our Nutrition Program operation to have a kitchen space to meet growing demand as our county ages; we are currently exploring the Government Center Old Sheriff Department location with utilization of county ARPA funding. Darby Smith and I continue to work with Maintenance Director Olson, consultants, and kitchen staff to create preliminary designs/estimates to be considered.

Public Health Emergency "Unwinding": The pandemic resulted in changes in Medicaid and FoodShare benefits and the renewal processes for many of our customers over the past few years. Effective March 1, customers will no longer receive the maximum FoodShare benefit. We are getting many calls from older adults who are concerned about food insecurity. Effective April 1, Medicaid continuous coverage will end. The ADRC recognizes this will result in potential changes in or loss of benefits for some of our customers. The ADRC will be here to assist customers with questions, renewals, and options counseling if they are losing benefits as they move through the unwinding process over the next year. The ADRC anticipates many phone calls and needed assistance to help people understand how to navigate through the changes.

Medicare Part D Open Enrollment: Each year (October 15 through December 7) our Benefits Specialists provide free consultation and benefits analysis so customers can make good fiscal decisions about drug plans. It is not uncommon for our staff to have multiple stories of saving individuals \$1,000's of dollars in medication co-pays while assisting them to choose the best plan. Just to give you another statistic of our growing aging population and their needs: in 2016 we assisted 558 unduplicated customers. In 2022, we assisted 1,234 unduplicated customers in this short 7.5 week span. We have some of the most dedicated and proficient Benefits Specialists in the State of Wisconsin. Thank you Leanne, Kim and Mary!

www.adrcconnections.org: Just a reminder that our website is a great place to start when looking for information about local resources, services and educational opportunities - like senior dining, home delivered meals, menus, support groups, commodities, memory screens, music and memory, transportation, respite, and benefits counseling. Staff have been busy creating many new upcoming opportunities for our community. If you or anyone you know needs any information about our services or would like ADRC staff to speak to a group in the community, please call 715-537-6225, email staff, or check out our website or like us on Facebook @ADRCBarron.

Department of Land Services

Soil & Water Conservation Division

The Soil & Water Conservation mission statement: **Our mission is to promote, assist and implement wise land use decisions in order to protect and sustain Barron County's soil, water and other natural resources.**

The majority of our focus and work is in the agricultural community. Barron County is the northernmost agriculturally dominated county in the state. As the dairy industry continues its consolidation (92 herds, down from approximately 1500 in the 1970s), the focus of our work has moved from dealing with manure runoff issues to working to reduce runoff from crop fields using the 4 keys to improving soil health:

- Armor the soil - typically leaving crop residue on the surface.
- Minimizing soil disturbance - No-till planting methods and equipment have made it possible to plant a crop without tillage.
- Increase plant diversity - Every type of crop does something different to the soil. By increasing the number of species over time, the health of the soil can increase while reducing the weed pressure.
- Continual living root - the relationship between the roots and the microbes in the soil is a complex one with nutrients going back and forth. The planting of cover crops after harvest increases the time for these interactions. In a year like this, cereal rye roots are still active in the soil, even in the winter.

Demo Farm: Barron County has a 12 acre Soil Health Demonstration field west of Cameron where we are implementing these ideas. We are working with producers in the County to explore the many new techniques for improving soil health in crop fields.

Manure Storage: Related to our work from the past, 362 manure storage facilities have been built in Barron County, the first one in 1971. Prior to 1989 the majority of them were constructed with an earthen liner and, as such, do have the potential to leach waste into the groundwater. We have worked with landowners that no longer have cattle to properly close 141 of these facilities over the last 25 years.

In 2022 we closed 5 facilities and have approximately 12 committed to be closed this year. For funding, many of the projects are partnerships with USDA-NRCS, where Barron County provides the technical work and NRCS provides the funding. This would leave approximately 25 idle earthen manure storages in the County.

Farmland Preservation Program: There were 193 participants that met full compliance with State runoff standards and were eligible to claim the tax credit of \$7.50 per acre in 2022 on a total of 47,213 acres. Each parcel is reviewed for compliance annually. The compliance aspects of this program are instrumental in protecting our surface and ground water quality.

Invasive Species: Japanese Knotweed is a restricted, nonnative invasive that has popped up in virtually every town in the county. Currently the SWCD is chemically treating 11 sites to slow the spread of Japanese Knotweed. Our dept. also spends a great deal of time dealing with and advising the public on treatment options for other invasive species found throughout the county i.e.; buckthorn, purple loosestrife, and garlic mustard to name a few.

Tree Sale: Our annual Tree Sale is beginning to wind down with just a few conifers remaining. We ordered a total of 22,000 trees this year and would have sold more; however, most nurseries are still unable to meet high demand. Our tree sale begins the first business day following the New Year and runs until we sell out. This year the tree order pick up day is April 28th. Spring is shaping up to be very busy as all 3 of our pull-behind tree planters are already reserved for multiple weekends.

NR 135 Non Metallic Mining: The purpose of the NR 135 – Non Metallic Mining program is to ensure the effective reclamation of nonmetallic mining sites in Barron County. All non metallic mining operators are required to have a reclamation permit, an approved reclamation plan, and proof of financial assurance for all non metallic mining sites.

Reclamation permits and financial assurances are reviewed annually and are based on the previous year's activities. Barron County performs surveys using GPS and drone equipment to calculate active and reclaimed acres. Reclamation completion is evaluated by performing a general overview and randomly generated sampling points to ensure reclamation is following the approved reclamation plan and in compliance with the uniform standards of the Barron County Non Metallic Mining Reclamation Ordinance. The following is a summary of non metallic mining program based on year 2022:

- 80 permits issued
- 7074 total approved acres
- 2062 active acres
- 146 reclaimed acres awaiting certification
- 55 acres certified complete

Groundwater Study: In 2022 we began a groundwater testing program. UW-Stevens Point has a groundwater center that is doing the testing. 345 samples were collected last year, and this year our goal is 450 to give us approximately 800 sample points across the county. This would provide an average of 1 sample for every square mile of land in the County.

Some early findings:

- Nitrates - 8% of the wells were over the standard of 10 ppm. Just looking at the Towns of Rice Lake, Stanley, Prairie Lake and Chetek, 13.6% were over 10 ppm.
- Manganese - 11.5% were over the standard of 0.3 ppm
- Sodium - 7.5% were above the level of concern (20 ppm) for individuals with a prescribed low salt diet.

This study relies on private well owner participation to succeed. We will be sending out requests to landowners across the County to provide a sample for this year's test this spring. Please spread the word! This will provide valuable information to the citizens of the county as a whole.

County Dams: The Department also coordinates the operation of 7 dams in the County. A major project in 2022 was the reconstruction of the Tainter Gate and some underwater concrete repairs at the Chetek Dam. It is a steel structure with a wood face and rubber seals. We upgraded it using a section of HDPE plastic over the wood. The Highway Department worked on the gate and a company from Duluth did the underwater work. The total cost of the project was \$60,000, and we received a \$30,000 grant from the State.

Child Support Agency

Lynette Metcalf, Program Manager

The Child Support Agency has added some contact points to serve our clients better. During regular business hours, our clients can call our call center at (414) 615-2596 and speak to a customer service representative or they can text our agency at (715) 240-5963.

The Child Support Agency's caseload is classified as either Non-enforceable (NIVD) or Enforceable (I-VD). The NIVD caseload does not provide the Child Support Agency with performance based funding and these clients are not utilizing state benefits, such as Badger Care. The I-VD cases are the focus of the Child Support Agency and workers, as this caseload is what provides the agency with the performance based funding to help support the Child Support program. The Child Support program's federal fiscal year (FFY) is from October 1st through September 30th. In the FFY of 2022 running from October 1st, 2021 through September 30th, 2022, the Child Support Agency's total collections were \$6,250,785.60, of which \$5,025,240.22 was for I-VD cases and \$1,225,545.38 was for NIVD cases.

Child Support funding is based on performance guideline categories of Court Order Establishment, Paternity Establishment, Current Child Support Collections, and Arrears Collections. The graph below represents a comparison of the Barron County Child Support Agency current performance with the State of Wisconsin's FFY Target goal and the State of Wisconsin's FFY 2023 (statewide average) performance.

	Barron County as of January 31, 2023	Wisconsin Target Rate at FFY End	Wisconsin FFY 2023 as of January 31, 2023
Court Order Establishment	95.43%	80%	85.33%
Paternity Establishment	99.05%	90%	89.31%
Current Child Support	76.51%	80%	74.24%
Arrears Collection	60.88%	80%	51.63%

The Barron County Child Support Agency was able to collect a total of \$1,489,942.38 from November 1, 2022 through January 31, 2023 to support our client's families.

The Barron County Child Support website (<https://www.barroncountywi.gov/departments>) is an excellent resource for clients to utilize. The website provides access to forms and helpful information such as applying for services, checking payment information, child support calculator, payment options, direct deposit form, job search form, medical documentation form, Motion to Change document, Stipulation and Order to Change document, and payment coupon access.

Child Support clients are strongly encouraged to call our call center Monday through Friday from 8:00am to 4:30pm at (414) 615-2596 to speak to a customer service representative. Clients can also reach our agency outside the call center hours by calling (715) 537-6390 and leaving a voicemail, texting at (715) 240-5963, or email our agency at childsupport@co.barron.wi.us.